

with low-dielectric-constant ("low-k") materials ... and replace therefore, in accordance with 37 CFR § 1.121(b)(1)(ii), the following:

Recently, there has been great interest to replace SiO₂ with low-dielectric-constant ("low-k") materials having dielectric constants lower than silicon oxide (e.g., about 3.9) as the ILD in interconnect structures. It is desirable to employ low-k materials as insulators in IC interconnect because these low-k materials reduce the interconnect capacitance. Accordingly, these low-k materials increase the signal propagation speed while reducing cross-talk noise and power dissipation in the interconnect.

In accordance with 37 CFR § 1.121(b)(1)(iii), please find attached to this response a separate marked up copy of the immediately preceding replacement paragraph. The attached page is captioned "Version with markings to show changes made".

IN THE CLAIMS

Please amend claim 21 by replacement with the following rewritten claim, in accordance with 37 CFR § 1.121(c)(1)(i), therefore:

21. (amended) The interconnect of claim 16, wherein the protective layer includes silicon carbide.

In accordance with 37 CFR § 1.121(c)(1)(ii), please find attached to this response a separate marked up copy of the immediately preceding rewritten claim. The attached page is captioned "Version with markings to show changes made".

Please add the following new claim:

34. (New) An interconnect comprising:
(a) a plurality of metal lines formed from a first metal layer, said metal lines having gaps therebetween;